

PRESS RELEASE

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“Baseball’s Antitrust Exemption - Where Do We Go From Here?”

**Statement of John Conyers, Jr.
New York Hilton, Morgan Suite**

Three months after one of the greatest world series in history, our national pastime stands on the verge of an economic and public relations disaster.

The issue of contraction is totally up in the air. Baseball faces lawsuits in Minnesota and a union grievance in New York. Their antitrust exemption is under attack in Congress, hearings have been held in the House and are scheduled in the Senate. State Attorney General investigations are underway in Florida and Massachusetts. The possibility of a strike or work stoppage looms. And new conflict of interest charges seem to pop up every day - if it’s not a sweetheart loan, it’s an insider sale.

In short, baseball is under an assault unlike any its ever experienced.

Fortunately, I am here today to report that I see a few faint glimmers of hope on the horizon. First, I have reached a tentative agreement with Major League Baseball, which would allow the Members of the Judiciary Committee to more fully understand baseball’s finances.

At our hearings in December you may recall that Commissioner Selig complained that baseball was hemorrhaging red ink. The problem is, he gave us precious few details to allow us to understand if the losses were real, imagined, or manufactured.

Yesterday, I met with Robert Manfred, Jr., labor counsel with Major League Baseball, who agreed they would waive their confidentiality agreement to allow the Players Union to give us the benefit of their expertise in analyzing these numbers. We still need to work out a final agreement, but I am very hopeful this will represent a step forward in our Federal understanding of baseball’s plight.

Second, I believe the proposal by Alabama-businessman Donald Watkins to buy the Minnesota Twins may offer baseball a tremendous opportunity. It is possible that in one fell swoop, Baseball would be able to save the Minnesota Twins, build a new stadium with private funds, and bring the first ever controlling minority team owner in the National or American Leagues into baseball. I hope the Commissioner would do everything in his power to make this happen as soon as feasibly possible.

Baseball is a great game, but it is undeniably a big business. It is the only business in America that is not fully subject to the antitrust laws or any government regulation. Opening up baseball’s books as well as its ownership ranks certainly would assist Congress in determining whether the lack of Federal regulation in this area should cause us any great concern.

More and more in Congress, and among our citizenry, there is a hope that Baseball will be more forthcoming and further open its ownership ranks. I believe this can happen.